

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC No. 02086-87
14 May 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, Intelligence Community Staff

FROM: Maj Gen Frank B. Horton III, USAF
Chairman

SUBJECT: Proposed NIC Paper on Future Signals Environment

1. After considerable research and discussion, we have concluded that it would not be feasible for the NIC to produce the paper on the foreign signals environment after 1995 that was requested by [] Chairman of the SIGINT Committee. We do not question your compelling need for guidance in planning [] we only doubt our ability to satisfy that need -- or any significant portion of it -- through such a paper. Among our reasons are the following:

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- We do not believe the Intelligence Community has the data needed to develop an estimate that identifies with the requested level of certainty the various political, economic, or military factors that may drive developments in the foreign signals environment after 1995. Weighing and correlating the interaction of such factors would be equally problematic. We believe that the best study we could produce would be so highly speculative that by no stretch of the term could it be called an estimate. A contractor, drawing upon unclassified technological studies and futurist techniques, probably could do as well as we could, if not better.
- Further, we do not believe it would be possible for anyone, using any information or methods known to us, to reliably predict the political, economic, or military environment []

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2. Some have suggested that it might be useful if we would at least update "A View of the Future," a speculative NIC paper

[redacted] We question, however, whether it would be appropriate to use a study like this for SIGINT planning. In writing "A View of the Future," our goal was to demonstrate the wide range of possible developments rather than to predict particular ones; and we did not assert that our projections should or even could be used as a basis for making long-term plans. In retrospect, we believe we were correct to doubt our forecasting skills: after only three years, it is already clear that we failed to anticipate a number of major events which may have great impact on the shape of the future. A prime example is the accession of Soviet leader Gorbachev and his subsequent massive reform campaign. An updated version of this paper is unlikely to be any more reliable.

3. Apart from these considerations, the sheer scope of the proposed paper is a major stumbling block, from the standpoints of both technology and geography. Perhaps the project could be disaggregated into issue areas of more limited technological and geographic scope, which could then be addressed individually. If you wish, we would be willing to work with you in such a process and, when key intelligence questions are raised, to identify elements in the Intelligence Community (including, perhaps, the NIC) which could be asked to address them.

4. I recognize and regret that our review of the proposed project has taken several months. That lengthy period, however, reflects our reluctance to reject the task while we thought there was any possibility we could find a handle by which to grasp it. After earnest effort and a good number of false starts, however, we have failed to find such a handle and have come to doubt there is one. In view of the importance of the issue, under other circumstances we might agree to proceed with this project against our better judgment. We have, however, been instructed by the Acting DCI to pare the NIC production program by eliminating projects of lesser importance or dubious doability. It is on the latter grounds that we believe this project fails to pass muster.

5. I will be happy to discuss this matter further with you at your convenience.

V/R

Frank B. Horton III